

A STUDY OF THE DRUM LANGUAGE IN ADZOGBO

by

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The Eve-speaking people of the Guinea Coast of West Africa are rightly renowned for their highly developed drumming and dancing. Among the most exciting of their dances is *Adzogbo*, originally a warriors' dance of the Fõ-speaking people of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey and now a recreational dance for the Fõ and Eve people of southern Benin, Togo and Ghana. *Adzogbo* is one of the most complex of the Eve dances, both in the intricacy of its polyrhythmic texture and the precise relationship of the rhythms of the master drum to the vigorous movements of the dancers. An outstanding feature of *Adzogbo* is the key role of drum language in the dance: every sequence of dance movements is introduced by a spoken or sung text which is then almost exactly reproduced in the rhythms of the master drum. *Adzogbo* thus provides excellent material for an analysis of drum language, especially the relationship between speech tone and drum strokes. In this article we shall sketch the general background of the dance and then look in detail at six examples of spoken texts and their associated drum rhythms.

The *Adzogbo* group

Adzogbo is said to have been a means for Dahomeyan war gods to communicate information about an impending battle to warriors. Several weeks before an encounter adolescent boys were secluded in the forest so that they might be made pure and fit to become spirit mediums. They were treated with herbs, kept apart from women and trained in the esoteric lore of the war gods associated with *Adzogbo*. The gods themselves were believed to dictate the dance movements and choreography that the boys practised. On the appointed day the boys were brought from the forest to dance *Adzogbo* before the warriors. Some of their members would become possessed with the spirit of a war god, and the war leader endeavored to foretell the course of the up-coming battle by interpreting the boys' dance movements, seeking clues from the deities on ways to protect themselves in battle. The legendary war leader *Kondo* is especially associated with this tale.

With the pacification of West Africa by the end of the 19th century the dance lost this esoteric function yet remained a vehicle for men to display their strength, agility and virile spirit. *Adzogbo* spread westward from Dahomey into Togo and as far as Aflao at the border of Ghana and Togo. Today, *Adzogbo* has become a recreational music but its original character as a war dance is not lost. Many of the dance sequences depict fighting scenes, notably boxing, and are replete with rapid spinning, leaping, etc. The dance demands tremendous stamina from the dancers and utmost concentration from the drummers. Although there are no longer inter-tribal wars in West Africa, modern life itself is a struggle. In *Adzogbo* men can express their inner strength and courage to meet life's hardships.

Modern *Adzogbo* groups still retain a close relationship with supernatural powers. A deity or fetish is associated with the group which protects the members. One of

the group members is in charge of the ceremonial for the god, performing the obligatory sacrifices and other customary observances in the special shrine where the image of the god is kept. Before each performance he pours libation to the god asking for his help and protection. No one god is especially linked to *Adzogbo*; any minor deity of the group's choice can be invoked to protect it. Members of the group no longer become possessed with the spirit of the god during performances.

Like many traditional Eve dances *Adzogbo* is performed by men and women joined together in formally institutionalized social groups, with officers, bye-laws, etc. (See Ladzekpo: 1971 and Jones: 1959). The elderly leaders of the group do not take an active part in the dancing and drumming but observe a performance from a place of honor behind the drummers. Dancers are both men and women ranging in age from their late teens to mid-thirties. *Adzogbo* is a strenuous dance and only fully mature individuals can partake in a performance. Indeed a dancer who falls down during a performance risks not only the ridicule of the audience but the displeasure of the deity associated with the group. The number of dancers varies according to the size of the community and the popularity of the group and can range from fifteen to thirty dancers of both sexes.

The costume of an *Adzogbo* dancer is elaborate, particularly for a man. A woman's costume is gaily printed cloth worn in the usual West African fashion, although no head kerchief is used. Unlike other Eve dancing groups there is no standardized cloth for the whole group; each woman is responsible for her own cloth. It is a matter of individual and family pride that a dancer appear in fine cloth.

Competition over costumes is very keen among the men, for their costume offers the chance for almost unlimited display of finery and wealth. Perhaps the most conspicuous part of the costume is the vast number of cloths arranged on cords and tied about a dancer's waist and abdomen in such a way that the folds of cloth stand out thickly from his body. One dancer may wear as many as twenty pairs of women's cloth. The number of cloths used depends on the wealth of the dancer's family and also his strength and agility, for if he wears too many cloths he may be unable to execute the fast turns and leaps required in the dance. Many head kerchiefs of different colors are tied about the upper torso. The cloths and kerchiefs create a dazzling blur of color as the dancer spins and twirls. The shoulders are covered with another head kerchief and gold jewelry is worn about the neck. A floppy cotton cap adorns the head. The entire upper body and arms are covered with white talcum powder to enhance the extraordinary quality of the dancer's appearance.

Below the waist the dancer wears *atsaka* or special Eve dancing shorts. The knees also receive special attention: first they are wrapped with protective bandage; then small gourd rattles are fastened around the knee which accentuate the rhythms created by the dancer's footwork; lastly two raffia "skirts" are tied on each knee. The under "skirt" is always kept in the shrine of the *Adzogbo* group's guardian deity. Since the principal idol symbolizing the god is never taken from its shrine, the raffia skirts represent the god during a performance, protecting the group from evil and guiding the dancers in their movements. One member of the group is responsible for gathering any loose strands which fall from the raffia "skirts" during the heat of a performance because it is feared they might be used to invoke malevolent supernatural forces against the group.

The drums used in *Adzogbo* are the standard Ewe drums constructed with staves of *odum* wood held together by iron rings much like a barrel. Formerly carved drums were used. The drum orchestra is led by the master drum (*atsimevu*) which is responsible for interpreting the introductory texts and cueing the dancers for all their many movements. At times two *atsimevu* playing in unison are used. The *atsimevu* is supported by two drums of intermediate size (*sogo* and *kidi*) which play rhythms complementing those of the master drum. The rhythmic foundation of the orchestra is provided by the bell (*ganʒkogui*) and rattle (*axatse*). The smallest supporting drum (*kagan*) plays a steady rhythm which enriches the polyrhythmic nexus of the whole ensemble. The drums are placed at the rear of the dancing ring behind the dancers.

Performance

A performance of *Adzogbo* generally takes place in the afternoon and may last from two to six p.m. Performances are held when a group member dies, at periodic occasions when the members want to make a public display, at a special occasion such as a funeral of a non-group member when the group is hired for the event, or at stool festivals or other important public holidays when durbars with traditional drumming and dancing are held. When a performance is about to begin the drummers arrange themselves at the rear of the dancing ring. The *atsimevu* is on the extreme right and the *sogo*, *kidi* and *kagan* are placed in a line to the master drummer's left. Benches are provided behind the drummers for the bell and rattle players and the elders of the group. A table with several towels and a large container of drinking water is placed in the center of the dancing ring. One of the group's officers is assigned to control the audience, keeping the dancing ring in its proper size and shape. When the elders have been seated and the dancers are nearly ready a libation of water and corn flour is poured to the ancestors of the group and, especially at funerals, the spirit of the deceased.

An *Adzogbo* performance has two parts: it begins with a section for the female dancers known as *Kadodo* and ends with the dance of the men called *Atsiā*. Before the drumming starts the female dancers form a semi-circle in front of the drummers and sing songs in free rhythm without accompaniment. After some time the song leader raises a song in strict rhythm to signal the drummers to start. The basic *Kadodo* dance movement is a side-to-side step which can be danced both gracefully with fluid gestures and vigorously with much shifting of the hips, depending on the rhythm of the master drum. The women also have several special movement sequences which are closely linked to *atsimevu* rhythms. The form of the *Kadodo*, then, is an alternation between the basic side-to-side step and the special movements sequences. There is much singing in *Kadodo* although it usually stops during the vigorous sections of the dance. Although each dancer must keep to the principal features of the dance there is great scope for individual interpretation and personal display. The entire *Kadodo* may last from forty-five minutes to one hour. The women may dance for a while and then return to the songs in free rhythm to rest before calling for another round of vigorous dancing.

As the *Kadodo* nears its end several of the women leave the dancing ring to help the men where they are dressing. The female song leader raises a song which calls the

male dancers asking whether they are ready and the women who have joined the men sing the affirmative reply. The song leader then raises another song which the master drummer echoes on the *atsimevu* providing the rhythm for the men to dance into the ring. They briefly dance around the ring showing themselves to the audience and then go back to the dressing area to make last minute adjustments to the costumes. It is very important that the cloths, kerchiefs, raffia skirts, etc. are well tied. If the female dancers are so moved they can dance the *Kadodo* for a while longer to give the men time to fix their costumes. At last another song is raised, and the men dance into the arena for the serious *Atsiā*.

The *Atsiā* features many elaborate and complex movement sequences which largely depict war-like scenes although comparatively recent recreational and religious themes are also expressed. An individual movement sequence is also called *atsiā*, a word usually translated as "style" or "display". These *atsiā* are traditional rhythm/movement compositions in which the dancers' movements are carefully timed to fit the rhythms of the master drum. Each style is introduced by a spoken text recited by the leader of the male dancers which contains the theme expressed in the subsequent dance sequence. The master drum rhythm is based on this text and, as we shall see, the strokes are carefully chosen to represent the speech tone pattern of the text.

The first 'styles' in the *Atsiā* are introduced by songs sung by the entire group. The first sample of drum language presented below is an example of this type. Having completed these opening 'styles', the male dancers form a semi-circle at any point in the dance ring. The dance leader now dramatically chants the text of any 'style' of his choice. As he speaks the last phrase of the text the bell starts and the master drummer leads the drummers in their rhythmic representation of the spoken text. The drum language is performed twice: first for the dance leader to demonstrate the movement sequence and again for all the men to dance. After each 'style' the dancers then rest for a while, moving freely around the ring, perhaps using the towels and drinking water to refresh themselves. When the dance leader starts another dance segment the dancers reform the semi-circle and prepare for action. The position of the dancers' semi-circle in the ring is always shifting, giving the entire audience a chance to see well.

The number of 'styles' performed in the *Atsiā* depends on many factors including the strength of the dancers, and the time limits of the performance. Typically the *Atsiā* may last about one hour and contain ten to fifteen 'styles'. During the *Atsiā* the women dance the basic *Kadodo* movement in a line in front of the drummers. In recent years it has become acceptable for a woman to join the men and execute a male dance segment displaying her knowledge of the dance and her dancing skill. When the dancers are tired the dance leader recites a certain text and the master drummer plays the 'style' which takes the men from the dancing ring.

Drum language

We shall now present six examples of the introductory texts and their associated drum language for the 'styles' in the *Atsiā* section of *Adzogbo*. Texts were chosen that elucidate important aspects of *Adzogbo* and whose associated rhythms typify the play of the master drum. Three different types of 'style' are represented: those

with a sung introduction (Ex. 1), those with moderate pace, ♩ = 108-126 (Exs. 1-5) and those with fast pace, ♩ = 164-184 (Ex. 6). For each example we shall briefly discuss the significance of the text and then present the text, corresponding drum strokes and translation in the line-by-line manner shown below:

drum strokes
text
translation

The *atsimevu* player uses a complement of seven basic strokes and four supplementary strokes which are designated by a vocable as shown below. Among traditional Eve musicians there is a great variety of vocables for each stroke and, in fact, the same syllable can be used to refer to several strokes. The authors have refined the traditional Eve system of drum mnemonics into the following standardised set of syllables:¹

- ga:** a bouncing stroke with the palm of the hand in the center of the drum head.²
- de:** a bouncing stroke with a stick in the center of the drum head.
- gi:** a bouncing stroke with the fingers at the edge of the drum head.
- dzi:** a pressed stroke with the fingers at the edge of the drum head.
- tsi:** a pressed stroke with a stick in the center of the drum head.
- tɔ:** a bouncing stroke with a stick in the center of the drum head while at the same time pressing the vellum with the other hand.
- kpa:** a bouncing stroke with a stick on the side of the drum.

In addition to these seven basic strokes, the following supplementary strokes are also used:

- dza:** the simultaneous sounding of **ga** and **kpa**.
- kre:** **de** followed immediately by **gi**.
- gre** or **vle:** **gi** followed immediately by **de**.
- vlo:** playing **dzi** and **tɔ** in very rapid succession

Although our work was done independently of previous scholarship on Eve drum mnemonics our set of strokes and syllables largely conforms to those presented by Jones (1959) and Pantaleoni (1972a); Pantaleoni's list of basic strokes is identical to ours with the addition of a variation of **ga**. The correspondence between Pantaleoni's basic strokes and ours is shown below.³

| Pantaleoni's identification | Standardised syllables |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Ringing sound | gi |
| 2. Center stroke | ga |
| 3. Pressed stroke | dzi |
| 4. Center pressed stroke | - |
| 5. Stick shot | de |
| 6. Pressed shot | tsi |
| 7. Muted shot | tɔ |
| 8. Kɔga | kpa |

Jones (1959) also presents a similar set of drum strokes. He distinguishes four kinds of strokes which correspond to our standardised set of drum syllables as follows:⁴

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Free beat | de, gi, ga |
| 2. Muted beat | tsi, dzi |
| 3. Secondary muted beat | tɔ |
| 4. Secondary muted beat, center | none |

Readers should consult the plates at the end of *Studies in African Music*, Vol. 1, for pictures of many of the Eve drum strokes.⁵

The transcriptions show the *atsimevu* rhythms with the associated introductory texts beneath. The transcription of Ex. 1 contains the introductory song and the associated *atsimevu* part. The bell rhythm is placed at the top of each transcription. The *atsimevu* rhythms have been carefully aligned beneath in order to check the vertical relationship between the bell and *atsimevu* parts. The position of notes on the *atsimevu* staff indicates the type of stroke rather than actual pitch. Strokes are placed on the staff in terms of their relative pitch (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

Example 1

This is an example of a 'style' with a sung introduction, the type customarily performed at the beginning of the *Atsiā* section. This song makes reference to the etiquette governing the rituals that are performed for the group's guardian deity and revered ancestors. Before addressing the deity the supplicant must kneel and touch his or her head to the earth (lines i and ii) and respectfully ask for the god's attention (line iii).

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| i | Leader: | dzadzi dzadzi (waiting rhythm) : Maqé yi vòdú yówé ³ Anyone who goes to call a god |
| ii | Group: | ga de ga Nā déñu dō : Must bow down his head. |
| iii | Leader and Group: | ga de tegi de dzi tɔ de ga ga de E - nú - gbé yí lā mé gbě 'gòo mā dō o Anyone who visits a place will not refuse to say "Agoo". |
| iv | | ga kre tɔ tɔ tɔ Ma - qé yi vò - dū yó - wé Anyone who goes to call a god |
| v | | dzadzi dzadzi (waiting rhythm) Nā déñu dō Must bow down his head. |

$\text{♩} = 126$

Bell

Song

Atsimevu

1

Ma de yi vo du yo we Na de ju do Ma de yi vo du yo we Na

2

3

de ju do E nu gbe yi la me gbe 'goo ma do Ma de yi vo du yo we Na

4

5

de ju do Ma de yi vo du yo we Na

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a tempo marking of quarter note = 126. It includes three staves: 'Bell' (top), 'Song' (middle), and 'Atsimevu' (bottom). The 'Song' staff contains two lines of lyrics. The second system continues the 'Song' and 'Atsimevu' parts, with lyrics for measures 3 and 4. The third system shows measure 5, with lyrics for the 'Song' staff and the 'Atsimevu' staff below it. The 'Bell' part is represented by a series of rhythmic notes on a staff without a clef.

The song has the antiphonal form which characterizes much of African vocal music: the dance leader and the group alternate lines i and ii twice and then sing the rest of the song together. After the song has been sung once the drums enter with a 'waiting rhythm' which does not represent the text (measures 2 and 5). The drum language itself begins when line ii is sung for the second time.

The next four examples are typical of the majority of 'styles' in the *Atsiā* section of *Adzogbo*. In each 'style' the dance leader recites the text in free rhythm but the bell starts during the last line of the text so that the drums can enter in their correct poly rhythmic alignment.

Example 2

This text is spoken from the point of view of warriors about to go to war. It begins with an oath of sincere commitment sworn to the ancestors (lines i-iii). As Ewe custom demands, the oath is sworn three times (line ii). Lines iv-vii refer to the warrior's guardian deity, in this case a river god. The proverb in line iv stresses that the god, the "sand in the river", will always be present to protect the men. Lines v-vii indicate that the warriors performed the necessary rites for their god before they set out for battle.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| i | dzi tsi ga de gide dzi tsi ga : <i>Mi' - qi' ye hwe - mo mi' - qi' ye</i> : We shall do it, ancestors, we shall do it. |
| ii | dzi tsi ga dzi tsi ga dzi tsi ga : <i>Mi' - qi' ye mi' - qi' ye mi' - qi' ye</i> : We shall do it, we shall do it, we shall do it. |
| iii | dzi tsi ga de gide dzi tsi ga <i>Mi' - qi' ye hwe - mo mi' - qi' ye</i> We shall do it, ancestors, we shall do it. |
| iv | gate gide ga de to de gi de ga : <i>To - gba do to - ke do to - gba do me</i> : The sand in the river will stay in the river. |
| v | to to de gre to de gi de ga <i>Mi' yi hu - no - wo gbo to - gba do - me</i> We went to the priests in the middle of the river. |
| vi | to to de gre to <i>Mi' yi hu - no - wo gbo</i> We went to the priests, |
| vii | ga degi de to to de gre to de gi de ga <i>A - dzo - lo - hu - su hu - no - wo gbo to - gba do - me</i> The priests of the big drum in the middle of the river. |

$\bullet = 126$

Bell

(see the key in Fig. 1)

Atsimevu

Text

Mi - qi ye hwe - mo mi - qi ye Mi - qi ye hwe - mo mi - qi

ye Mi - qi ye mi - qi ye mi - qi ye Mi - qi ye mi - qi ye mi - qi

ye Mi - di ye hwe - mo mi - di ye To - gba do to - ke do to - gba do

me To - gba do to - ke do to - gba do - me Mi yi hu - no - wo gba to - gba do

me Mi yi hu - no - wo gba A - dzo - lo hu - su hu - no - wo gba to - gba do

me

Example 3

This text is spoken from the perspective of a man who was invited to join the *Adzogbo* dancers by a younger fellow. The man was not sure of the steps but felt confident because he thought he could rely on the young fellow to guide him. When they entered the dancing ring, however, the fellow walked away and the man was left to dance alone. Since the deity associated with *Adzogbo* is known to kill any dancer who falls down, the action of the younger dancer was serious indeed.

- i. ga dzi de ga dzi de
 ||: O' - vi' - tseyè ò - vi' - tseyè
 Young boy, young boy,
- ii. dzi dzi de dzi gade gre
 Wò ò - mi wá gù - mè
 You brought me into the dancing ring
- iii. dzi dza dza dza dza dza dza dza dza
 Bòzò hā - yà - hā - yà hā - yà - hā - yà
 And walked (away) roughly, roughly.
- iv. gi tō
 Mu yówo :||
 I call you!
- v. dzi tō gi de gi de ga
 ||: E' - tē na s̄ - ìn s̄ wùá
 Because of this would you kill me?
- vi. gi tō
 Mu yówo
 I call you!

vii ga tɔ gi de gi de ga
Gbê - tɔ na sɔ - m sɔ wɔa
 A person to kill me?

viii gi tɔ
Mu yɔwo :||
 I call you!

ix ||: N' - kú mɔ sù - dɛ ma - mɔ dɛ - dɛ tɛ :||
 Remember what you have done to me.

x ga dzi de ga dzi de
O - vi tsyɛ ò - vi tsyɛ
 Young boy, young boy,

xi dzi dzi de dzi gade gre
Wò dɛ - mi wá gù - mɛ
 You brought me into the dancing ring

xii dzi dza dza dza dza dza dza dza dza
Bòzò há - yà - há - yà há - yà - há - yà
 And walked (away) roughly, roughly.

xiii gi tɔ
Mu yɔwo
 I call you!

♩ = 126

O - vi - tsyɛ o - vi - tsyɛ Wo dɛ - mi wa gu - me Bozo

ha - ya - ha - ya ha - ya - ha - ya Mu yɔwo O - vi - tsyɛ o - vi -

tsyɛ Wo dɛ - mi wa gu - me Bozo ha - ya - ha - ya ha - ya - ha - ya Mu

7
yowo E - te na so - m so wua Mu yowo Gbe - to na so - m so wua Mu

8
yowo E - te na so - m so wua Mu yowo Gbe - to na so - m so wua Mu

9
yowo N - ku mo su - de ma mo di - di te N - ku mo su - de ma mo di - di

10
te O - vi - tsey o - vi - tsey Wa di - mi wa gu - me Bozo

11
ha - ya - ha - ya ha - ya - ha - ya Mu yowo

Example 4

This text makes clear reference to battle and the important role both drummers and the gods have in war. Lines i-iii are vocables which represent introductory drum rhythms. Line iv refers to the (great) strength and endurance needed by the man who plays a war drum. A *Le* drum is made from the *Le* tree whose hard wood is well suited for drums. The dance leader boasts that he and his mates will meet and slaughter their enemies (lines v and vi) with the support of the *Adzogbo* god, *Okplagada* (lines vii and viii). As the text ends and the dancing is about to begin the dance leader exhorts the master drummer to play with vigour for the men are anxious to dance with spirit.

| | | | | |
|-----|---|---------|------------|-----------|
| i | dzàdzà | dzàdzà | dzàdzà | |
| ii | degide | gàdedzi | degide | dzidzà |
| iii | gidegide | gàtɔ | degidegide | dzidzà |
| iv | gi de | ga de | tɔ tɔ | de dzi ga |
| | : Kò - ta dà gbe - tã iò qò lɛ - hú - tseye : | | | |
| | A strong chest is needed by the man who plays the <i>Le</i> drum. | | | |

- v dzi tsi ga dzi tsi ga gi de dzi te dzi
Mí - kpé lè 'fí - dé á - me - ta lá dze anyi
 When we meet at some place a person's head will fall down.
- vi kre dzi ga dzi tsi ga gi de dzi te dzi
'Tsiadó kpé lè 'fí - dé á - me - ta lá dze anyi
 When a flamboyant dancer meets (another) at some place a person's
 head will fall down.
- vii ga dzi de dzi dzi de ga dzi
A - ó lè - gbá á - ma - shí kpe - lé
 Our god will never fail us,
- viii ga de gi de ga de dzi dza
O' - kplá - gá dá dā 'dzò - hú - tsyé
 Okplagada, the owner of Adzogbo.
- ix gi de dzi tó gide ga dzi tsi dzi tsi dzi
Dzi - dá - hú - tó kpò - kplò á - dá - xó - hú mí
 Master drummer, play loudly for we are serious.

♩ = 126

Dza-dza dza-dza dza - dza de gi de ga de dzi de gi de dzi

dza gi de gi de ga tó degi de gi de dzi dza Kó-ta da gbe-ta tó djo lé - hu -

tsye Kó-ta da gbe-ta tó djo lé - hu - tsye Mí-kpe le 'fí-de á - me-ta lá

dze 'anyi tsido kpe le 'fí - de á - me ta lá dze 'anyi A - o le-gba á - ma-shi



Example 5

The text of this 'style' concerns the former days of *Adzogbo* when young boys were secluded in the forest. Certain seeds called *Ata* and *Vi* were used to purify one of the boys, *Oyekple*, who became possessed with the spirit of the god (lines vii and viii). Through *Oyekple* those in the forest were able to understand the deep meanings of the rhythms of the master drum (line i) and recognize the hyena and lion as sacred creatures which communicated with the priests.

- | | |
|------|---|
| i | dzàdzà dzàdzà dzà dzà (vocables) |
| ii | gi de ga de dzi de dzi degi de gi tɔ Dzò - sò - hú zù vo - dú bõe dò shi ná da - wè The war drum becomes a god and talks to the elders. |
| iii | dzàdzàdzi dzàdzàdzi (vocables) |
| iv | gi de ga de dzi de dzi degi de gi tɔ Dzò - sò - hú zù vo - dú bõe dɔ shi ná da - wè The war drum becomes a god and talks to the elders. |
| v | vlo ga de dzi de dzi de gide gi tɔ Kpɔwò zù vo - dú bò - yɔ hú - bò - nɔ Hyenas become gods and call the priest. |
| vi | vle ga de dzi de dzi de gide gi tɔ Hwõe wõe zù vo - dú bò - yɔ hú - bò - nɔ Lions become gods and call the priest. |
| vii | ga tɔ tɔ de ti de dza : O' - yé - kple dɔ - so nú - mi : Oyekple reveals all this to us. |
| viii | ga de gi de ga de tɔ de gi de dza A' - tá kù - dɔ vi kpó - é dɔ - so nú - mi Ata and Vi reveal all this to us. |
| ix | ga dzi de dzi dzi de ga gi A' - ó lè - gbá à - ma - shí kpe - lé Our gods will never fail us. |
| x | ga tɔ tɔ de gi de ga O' - yé - kple dɔ - so nú - mi Oyekple reveals all this to us. |
| xi | gi de dzi tɔ kre ga dzi tsi dzi tsi dzi Dzi - dà - hú - tɔ kpò - kplo à - dà - xɔ - lú mi Master drummer, play loudly for we are serious. |

$\text{♩} = 126$

Dza dza dza dza dza dza Dzo-sohu zu vo-du boe ɔ̃ shi na

da-we Dza dza dzi dza dza dzi Dzo-sohu zu vo-du boe ɔ̃ shi na
da - we

da we Kpwo zu vo-du bo-ye hu-bo no Hwœ woe zu vo-du bo-ye hu-bo-

no O-ye-kple ɔ̃-so-nu-mi O-ye-kple ɔ̃-so-nu-

mi A-ta ku-do vi kpo-e ɔ̃-so-nu-mi A-o-le-gba a-ma-shi

kpe-le O-ye-kple ɔ̃-so-nu-mi Dzi-da-hu-to kpo-kplo a-da-xo-lu

mi

Example 6

This text emphasizes the essential function of the gods (Bodza, line iv, a deity associated with *Adzogbo*) in protecting the dancers and the necessity of giving sacrifices to them. It is believed that the gods must be given nourishment if they are to provide protection to their human followers.

- i ||: dzàdzà dzà dzà dzà dzà (vocables)
- ii de gi ga tɔ
Dzi - dɔ - wò hoè :||
It is for people of courage.
- iii ||: ε - qɔ mɔ - dzá
They asked for sacrifice.
- iv de dzi ga gide dzi dzi ga
Bò - dzá gbá - qɔ dzi - dɔ wòe :||
Bodza also demanded a courageous sacrifice.
- v ga dzi de dzide dzi dzi
A - dzi yé qɔ mɔ - dzá
A hen was sacrificed to them.
- vi dza dza dza dza de gi ga tɔ
Bò - dzá gbá - qɔ dzi - dɔ - wò hoè
(now) Bodza has given us courage.

$\text{♩} = 184$

1 Dza dza dza dza dza dza

2 Dzi-do - wo hoe Dza dza dza dza dza dza

3 Dzi-do - wo hoe ε - qɔ mɔ - dzá Bò - dza gbá qɔ

7

dzi - do we E - do ma - dza Bo - dza gba do

9

dzi - do A - dzi - ye do ma - dza do - dza gba do

11

dzi - do - wo hae

Speech tones and drum strokes

We now turn to an analysis of the relationship between speech tones and drum strokes in these six examples in hopes of determining the essential features of Ewe drum language. An examination of the correspondence of spoken syllable to drum stroke quickly reveals that in general one spoken syllable is represented by one drum stroke. Occasionally one stroke stands for two syllables (Ex. 3, line iii, "Bozo"). Conversely, one syllable can be represented by several strokes if they are played in a rapid rhythmic figure such as *tegi* or *gide* (see Ex. 2, line vii, "Adzolohusu", and line i, "hwemɔ"). *The rule, however, is for one spoken syllable to be represented by one drum stroke.*

There is a parallel between the phrasing of the text and the phrasing of the rhythms of the master drum. If the transcriptions are studied it can be seen that in most cases there are short rests in the master drum rhythms which clearly correspond to pauses between significant phrases in the spoken text. *The rule is for the musical phrasing of the master drum to follow closely the phrasing in the spoken text.*

If we compare the speech tones of the text with the drum strokes of the master drum, certain correspondences become apparent. First, the stroke *ga* is used to represent syllables having low speech tone. In all six examples there are only three instances in which *ga* does not represent a low speech tone (Ex. 2, line iv, *do*, Ex. 4, line vii, *kpe*, and Ex. 5, line ix, *kpe*). Second, the strokes *dzi*, *tsi* and *to* are consistently associated with syllables having high speech tones. This can be clearly seen in line ii of Ex. 2 where *dzi* and *tsi* are contrasted with *ga* to represent a HHL HHL HHL speech tone sequence ("miqi ye, miqi ye, miqi ye"), or in line iv of Ex. 3 where *to* is contrasted with *ga* to represent a LH L HH ("nku mo suqe") speech tone sequence. *We conclude, therefore, that ga, dzi, tsi and to are strokes which have a fixed relationship to speech tones: ga is associated with syllables having low speech tone while dzi, tsi and to are associated with syllables having high speech tone.*

The relationship of the strokes *de* and *gi* to speech tones is not as clear. They can be associated with syllables having low, mid and high speech tone. In Ex. 1, for

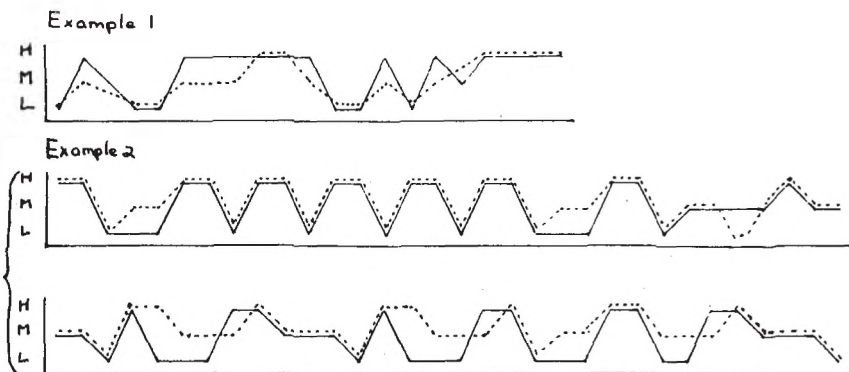
instance, **de** and **gi** represent syllables with high speech tones (line iii “*nugbe*”) while in Ex. 2 they represent syllables having both low (line i, “*hwemɔ*”) and mid tones (line iv, “*tɔgba ɔɔ tɔke*”).

The use of **de** and **gi** to represent syllables of low and high tones can be explained by examining their position within a tonal sequence. When **de** and **gi** are associated with high tones they usually are preceded or followed by **ga** (Ex. 1, line ii, “*na denu do*”) and, conversely, when **de** and **gi** correspond to low tones they are usually preceded or followed by **dzi**, **tsi** or **tɔ** (Ex. 2, line i, “*hwemɔ miɔi*” or Ex. 5, line ix, “*Ao legba*”). *We find that de and gi can have a relative relationship to speech tone: They can represent syllables with low tone when preceded or followed by a stroke having a fixed high tone and they can represent syllables with high tone when preceded or followed by a stroke having a fixed low tone.*

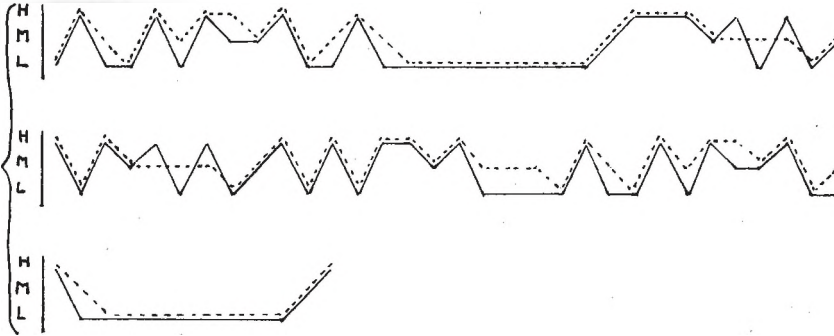
From a purely aural point of view, however, **de** and **gi** clearly have a mid character when compared to **ga** on the one hand and **dzi**, **tsi** and **tɔ** on the other. Statistical analysis supports this observation. By counting the times **de** and **gi** are used to represent the three kinds of syllables we discover the following percentages: **de**: low – 37%, mid – 39%, high – 24%; **gi**: low – 36%, mid – 45%, high – 19%.⁷ Furthermore, when Mr. Agbeli analysed the speech tones of the introductory texts he consistently assigned mid tone to the vocables **de** and **gi**. *We conclude, therefore, that de and gi are inherently associated with syllables having mid tone.*

The supplementary drum strokes, **dza**, **kre**, **gre**, **vle** and **vlo**, assume the character of their associated basic strokes. Thus **dza** has a fixed relationship to low tones, **vlo** has a fixed relationship with high tones and **vle**, **gre** and **kre** are inherently mid-tone but have a relative relationship to speech tone which depends on their position within a tonal sequence. The basic stroke **kpa** has no function in drum language.⁸

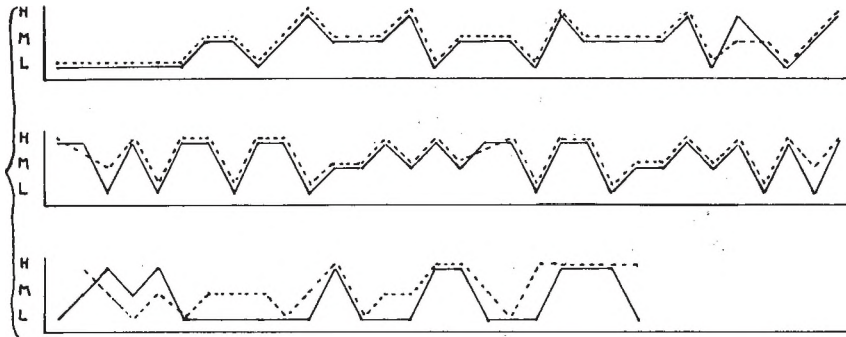
The following graphs compare the overall rhythms of the master drum and the general contour of the speech tone pattern in each example. This graphic representation clearly shows the close correspondence between the speech tone patterns and their associated sequences of master drum strokes. In the graphs, “—” is used for speech tones while “- - -” is used for drum strokes.



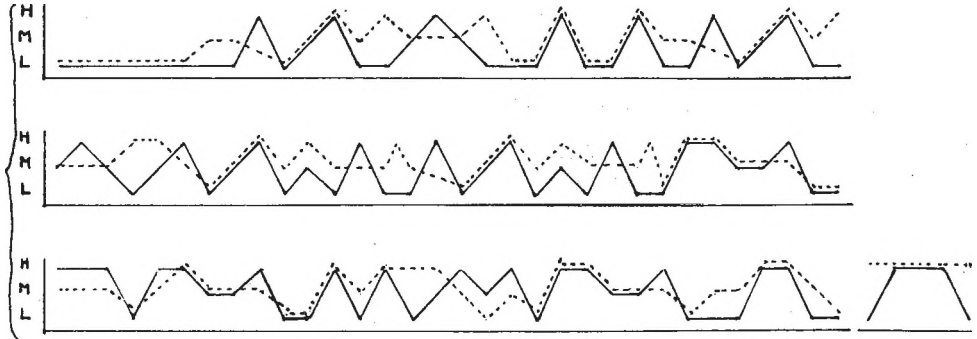
Example 3



Example 4



Example 5



Example 6





It is evident from these graphs that the rise and fall of speech tones in the spoken texts is mirrored in the rhythms of the master drum. It is not necessary, however, for a low speech tone always to be represented by *ga*, a mid speech tone by *de* or *gi*, or a high tone by *dzi*, *tsi* or *tɔ*. The drum language is understood as long as the overall contour of the speech tone pattern is reflected in the sequence of drum strokes.

Exceptions, such as the use of *tɔ* and *dzi* to represent low-toned syllables (lines ii "dawe" and line xi, "mi" in Ex. 5) do occur. They usually happen when musical considerations preempt strict adherence to the general rule of correspondence between speech tone and drum stroke, as in prominent themes or cadential phrases.

In Ex. 5, for instance, lines ii, iv, v and vi of the text end with a low-toned syllable but the corresponding *atsimevu* phrases end with *tɔ*. This exception to the rule is explained by musical elements in the *atsimevu* part. Measures 1-8 of the *atsimevu* part are quite similar: lines ii and iv are identical, separated by a short interjection, *dzadzadzi dzadzadzi*, while lines v and vi are identical in rhythm but contain a tonal/timbral contrast between *vlo* and *vle*. Each of these four lines contains the theme, *gadedzi dedzi degide gitɔ* (see Fig. 2) in which the fragment *gitɔ* is the culminating tonal and rhythmic element.



Fig. 2

Tonally, the high pitched *tɔ* imparts a feeling of finality; rhythmically, the figure *gitɔ* () creates the key rhythmic contrast of the phrase, a brief 2 : 3 horizontal cross-rhythm against the previous groups of eighth notes (). The musical importance of *tɔ* in the phrases overrides the general rule of stroke/syllable correspondence.

Line xi of Ex. 5 (measures 12 and 13) contains one of the clear cadential formulas in *Adzogbo* (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

The climactic phrase of this formula is a figure of four dotted-sixteenth notes which creates a feeling of rushing toward the concluding note. The same cadential formula is used to end Ex. 4 (measures 10 and 11) as well. The use of *dzi* and *tsi* in this cadential formula obviates the need for an exact parallel between stroke and tone at this point. *We conclude that the rule is for the sequence of drum strokes to follow closely the contour of the speech tone pattern, but the rule may be suspended where musical considerations dominate.*

In conclusion we can summarize the basic rules of Eve drum language as follows:

1. One drum stroke normally represents one syllable.
2. Rhythmic phrases correspond to speech phrases.

3. Six basic strokes are used to represent the three tones of the Ewe language:
 - a. Certain strokes have a fixed relationship to tone, i.e. *ga* to low tone, *dzi*, *tsi* and *tɔ* to high tone.
 - b. Other strokes, *de* and *gi*, are inherently mid tone but have a relative relationship to tone, i.e. assuming low tone when preceded or followed by *dzi*, *tsi* and *tɔ* or high tone when preceded or followed by *ga*.
4. The contour of the speech tone pattern is mirrored in the sequence of drum strokes.
5. Musical factors may temporarily suspend the principle of correspondence between speech tone and drum stroke.

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NOTES

- 1 For a more detailed discussion of these strokes see Locke and Agbeli, to appear.
- 2 A bouncing stroke is one in which the stick or hand strikes and is brought away from the vellum allowing it to vibrate freely. A pressed stroke is one in which the stick or hand strikes and is kept in contact with the vellum.
- 3 Pantaleoni, 1972, pp. 65-71.
- 4 Jones, 1959, pp. 61-67.
- 5 The correspondence between our set of vocables and Jones' plates is as follows:
Jones' plate no. vii - standardized syllable *de* on *kagan*; viii - *tɔ* on *kidi*; ix - *de*; x - *tɔ*; xi - *tɔ*; xii - *dza*; xiii - *dzi*, all on *atsimevu*; xiv - *ga*, xv - *dzi*; xvi - *dzi*, all on *sogo*.
- 6 Westerman (1930, p. 26) says that there are three simple tones, high, low and middle, and two compound tones, rising and falling, in the Ewe language. Mr Agbeli found only the three simple tones in the *Adzogbo* texts. We have marked them as follows: high tone, acute accent (´), mid tone, horizontal line (-) and low tone, grave accent (`).
- 7 Corresponding figures for the other strokes are: *ga*: low - 97%, mid - 3%; *dzi*: low - 9%, mid - 9%, high - 82%; *tsi*: high - 100%; *tɔ*: low - 8%, high - 92%.
- 8 While having no function in drum language *kpa* has four important roles in Ewe drumming:
 1. A rapid series of *kpa* strokes in free rhythm calls group members to attention.
 2. The master drum uses *kpa* strokes to play the bell rhythm to establish the time referent when the music begins, if there is a tempo change, or if the bell player falters.
 3. The master drummer uses *kpa* to maintain his timing and sustain musical interest between phrases of drum language.
 4. A basic principle of drumming with one hand and one stick is that both hands should always be active: *kpa* enables the stick hand to be active even when it is not needed to manifest drum language.